

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2016*

## **Remarks at an Eid al-Fitr Reception**

*July 21, 2016*

The President. Hello, everybody. Well, *Eid Mubarak*.

*Audience members. Eid Mubarak.*

*The President.* Can everybody please give Aisha a big round of applause? It was such a kind introduction. I want to thank her for her eloquent letter and speaking out not just for herself, but on behalf of Muslim Americans everywhere. She was a little nervous when she came out, and she did great. So I was nervous the first time I did this—[*laughter*]*—*but I have to admit, I've done this a while now.

I want to thank Raahima for sharing words from the Holy Koran. I want to welcome to the White House everybody who is here.

For the past 7 years, we've held our annual iftar dinner. Some of you have joined us on those occasions. This year, for my last year as President, I wanted to do something a little bit different, and I'm very proud to host this Eid celebration at the White House. I want give some particular thanks to our White House liaison to the Muslim American community, Zaki Barzinji, for his great work on our event. And we're joined by so many proud and patriotic Muslim Americans from across the country and from all walks of life.

This Ramadan, we said goodbye to somebody who was not only a friend to many here, a great American, of—somebody who I had the great honor to know—the Greatest, the Champ, Muhammad Ali. And as proud of his blackness as he was of his faith, the Champ taught us that the most important thing in life is to be ourselves. And so today we are especially honored to be joined by his wonderful wife Lonnie and six of his children. So please give them a big round of applause.

So we're coming together to celebrate Eid and the blessings of another holy month of Ramadan. I know we are a little late this year. [*Laughter*] The advantage is that you're not as hungry as you were a couple of weeks ago. [*Laughter*] But our celebration is just as festive; the food is just as good.

For Muslims across the United States and around the world, this is a time of spiritual renewal, a time to reaffirm your duty to serve one another, especially the least fortunate among us. And it's a time to reflect on the values that guide you in your faith: gratitude, compassion, and generosity. And it's a reminder that those values of Islam, which comes from the word *salaam*, meaning peace, are universal. They bind us all, regardless of our race or religion or creed, in a common purpose, and that is in our shared commitment to the dignity of every human being.

Today is also another reminder that Muslims have always been a part of America. In colonial times, many of the slaves brought over from Africa were Muslim. We insisted on freedom of religion, in Thomas Jefferson's words, "for the Jew and Gentile, the Christian and the Mahometan." [*Laughter*] For more than two centuries, Muslim Americans of all backgrounds—Arab and Asian, African and Latino, Black and White—have helped build America as farmers and merchants, factory workers, architects, teachers, and community leaders.

And Muslim Americans have enriched our lives every single day. You're the doctors we trust with our health, entrepreneurs who create jobs, artists who inspire us, activists for social justice, like the LGBT Muslims who are on the frontlines in the fight for equality. You are the athletes that we cheer for, like American fencing champion Ibtihaj Muhammad. She's going to be proudly wearing her hijab when she represents America at the Rio Olympics. No pressure. [Laughter]

Muslim Americans help keep us safe. You're our firefighters, our police officers, like Deputy Police Chief Malik Aziz of the Dallas Police Department, who's helping that community that is still grieving heal after the tragic attack against law enforcement in that city. "There can be no actual progress unless we actually work together," Malik has said. "The police and the community must work together. There is no us versus them." So we thank Malik for his outstanding service.

And Muslim Americans serve proudly in our Armed Forces, risking their lives to defend our freedom. Now, we're especially honored to be joined by veterans here today like Sheikh Nazeem Abdul Karriem, who fought in World War II. He said he's 95, but I think he's lying. [Laughter] He looks younger. He says he tells people he's 59. [Laughter] And—but we are so proud of him and what he's done to fight for our freedom. And I'd ask all our proud servicemembers and veterans, if you can, to raise your hands so that we can thank you for your service.

By the way, I should mention that Muslim Americans aren't just heroes in real life. One of today's most popular comic book superheroes is a Pakistani American girl named Kamala Khan, also known as Ms. Marvel. And I'm a comic book fan. [Laughter] But it's important that our children see positive, rich portrayals of all people, including Muslims from all walks of life, not just in the national security context, in the news and TV and movies, we—the diversity and depth of the Muslim American experience needs to be portrayed.

So let's be clear: Muslim Americans are as patriotic, as integrated, as American as any other members of the American family. And whether your family has been here for generations or you're a new arrival, you're an essential part of the fabric of our country.

Now, of course, we can't deny that we're in challenging times right now. This is a difficult time for Muslim Americans. Like——

*Audience member.* Four more years!

*The President.* Well, that——

*Audience members.* Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

*The President.* No, no, no. Nope, nope, nope. Michelle is going to come down and scold you. [Laughter] Don't say that.

Like all Americans, you worry about the threat of terrorism. But on top of that, you fear that your entire community will be blamed for the violent acts of a few who do not represent your faith.

As many of you know, earlier this year I had the chance to visit the Islamic Society of Baltimore, and I met with some outstanding Muslim Americans from across the country. And they told me about the great work they're doing in business and education and medicine and social justice. But they were very honest with me about their anxieties and their fears of being targeted because of their faith.

And I get heartbreaking letters like the one from Aisha. She told me, "There were moments in my life where I would want to just take off my hijab and leave my identity behind so I can fit in with my peers." That's a young American, full of promise, full of possibility, fearful because of her faith. And we've seen a spike in Muslim Americans, including children, being attacked, mosques being targeted, especially during the final, holiest days of Ramadan. And that shouldn't be happening in the United States of America.

Singling out Muslim Americans, moreover, feeds the lie of terrorists like ISIL that the West is somehow at war with a religion that includes over a billion adherents. That's not smart national security. In fact, it is ISIL and Al Qaida and organizations like those that are waging war on Muslim communities even during the holy month. And discriminating against Muslim Americans is also an affront to the very values that already make our Nation great.

So on days like this, and on every day, we need to be clear about what we stand for. Muslim Americans and all Americans have to reject hatred. Muslim Americans and all Americans have to reject discrimination. Muslim Americans and all Americans have to answer those who would peddle hate or suggest that somehow their interpretations of their faith justify violence.

All of us have those obligations, whether we are Christian or Jew or Hindu or Muslim or of no faith at all. We have to affirm that in this country, it is our obligation to abide by the law, to look out for each other, to be part of a single community, and that we can still appreciate our differences and retain those things that are essential to our identities and still strongly affirm our commitment and our faith in this country.

We've got to rededicate ourselves to make sure that no American feels isolated or second-class citizens. And I especially want to speak to the young people who are here, to make sure that you know that we see you, that we believe in you. And despite what you may sometime hear, you've got to know that you're a valued part of the American family and there's nothing that you cannot do.

So during what was a difficult Ramadan, where we saw hundreds of innocent lives taken in Istanbul and Dhaka and Baghdad and Medina, as well as in Orlando and Nice——

*Audience member.* Syria.

*The President.* And Syria—I was getting to Syria, but—well, look, I mean, the brutal images and suffering that are taking place there are heartbreaking. And so that—the message has to be sent that we will stand with our friends and our allies around the world, including Muslim communities: that we will engage with those who want peace, that we will go after those who will harm innocents, that we will encourage dialogue not just between faiths, but oftentimes, within the Muslim faith itself, which has driven violence in some parts of the world.

And in the face of terrorism, we will prevail. But we will prevail by working together, not driving each other apart.

And that's ultimately what we have to do as Americans: to stand together and look out for one another. And we welcome those who believe in the basic promise of our country and that no matter who you are, what you look like, where you're from, how you worship, if you work hard, if you are responsible, if you are law abiding, then you can make it here in America.

That's the story of Aref and Aida Saad. Where are they?

*Audience member.* Right here.

*The President.* There you are way in the back. [*Laughter*] You can see their hands. In 1973, Aref and Aida decided to pack up their lives in Lebanon and come to America in search of a better life. The couple settled down in Detroit, Michigan. Aref spotted an opportunity. He started a distribution company that specialized in halal meat to serve the growing Muslim population in Detroit. Forty years later, it's a thriving company. And they're now paying it forward. One of their daughters, Fayrouz, used to work in my administration; she now works with the Detroit Mayor's Office helping to welcome today's immigrants and refugees.

And so the Saads, they set a great example for new arrivals like Heba and Rahaf Alrahawan. Heba and Rahaf, where are you?

*Audience members.* Right here.

*The President.* There you are. So back home in Syria, these two sisters watched as the growing violence leveled their neighborhood, demolished their home, destroyed their father's car company. And in 2012, their family fled Syria and spent 4 years in Malaysia as refugees. Four months ago, they were able to come to Brooklyn to start their lives over. In their first week, they signed up for English classes. Heba works in a clothing store on the weekends, studies English during the weekdays, hopes to save enough money to enroll in college to study information technology.

So when you look at the life that the Saads have built, you look at Muslim Americans in this room who've made incredible contributions in every possible field, it's not hard to imagine that these two sisters are going to do the same. So, Heba and Rahaf, welcome to America. We're proud to have you here.

And that's what makes this country special. You work hard, you do the right thing, and you can not only make a difference for ourselves and our families, but we can make a difference for the life of the Nation.

So today we celebrate this wonderful holiday and honor a great faith, but we also recommit ourselves to building an America where everybody has the opportunity to achieve their dreams. And we reaffirm the values of democracy and freedom of religion and tolerance and community building and understanding and hard work that allows all of us—whatever our faiths—to prosper.

So I'm proud of all of you. I hope you enjoy this wonderful reception. Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Beaverton, OR, resident Aisha Osman; Leesburg, VA, resident Raahima Sadiqqi; and White House Associate Director of Public Engagement Zaki Barzinji. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Eid al-Fitr reception.

*Locations:* Washinton, DC.

*Names:* Ali, Yolanda "Lonnie"; Alrahawan, Heba; Alrahawan, Rahaf; Aziz, Malik; Barzinji, Zaki; Karriem, Sheikh Nazeem Abdul; Muhammad, Ibtihaj; Obama, Michelle; Osman, Aisha; Saad, Aida; Saad, Aref; Saad, Fayrouz; Sadiqqi, Raahima.

*Subjects:* Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Brazil : 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro; Civil rights : Freedom of religion; Civil rights : Lesbian, gay,

bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Civil rights : Racial equality; Holidays and special observances : Eid al-Fitr; Holidays and special observances : Eid-al-Fitr; Sports : Olympic Games; Syria : Civil war and sectarian conflict; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist organization; Terrorism : Global threat; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Texas : Dallas :: Shootings of law enforcement officers; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Public Engagement, Associate Director.

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